

The Anthropocene and Climate Change: An Existential Crisis

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Abstract: The idea of the Anthropocene is investigated in a multidisciplinary study by combining the perspectives of geography, biology and media ecology (i.e. the study of the impacts of technology). The hypothesis is developed that the Anthropocene did not have a precise starting point (i.e. there is no “golden spike”), but that the Anthropocene began in starts and fits and that it was not evenly distributed over time and space and that as time increased the severity of the changes to the Earth’s environment due to human activity increased with time to the point that it now threatens the very possibility of human existence on this planet. We have identified six stages in the evolution of the Anthropocene starting from the global dispersal of Homo sapiens to today’s looming crisis of global warming, climate change and the Earth’s sixth mass extinction event which we are currently in the midst of. The six stages of the emergence of the Anthropocene that are identified include the Paleo-anthropocene with the extinction of megafauna and the large-scale forest clearing by fire; the Neo-anthropocene or the Neolithic Revolution and the beginning of the Holocene; the Tradeo-anthropocene with the spread of flora and fauna globally through global trade; the Industrio-anthropocene or the Industrial Revolution; the Benzino-electro-anthropocene beginning with the gasoline powered motor car and the electrification of lighting and motors; and the Extremo-anthropocene with the onset of global warming and climate change. A description is made of anthropocentric technology defined as the digital technology that emerged in the sixth stage of the anthropocene, namely the 1980s. This includes the flip from McLuhan’s notion of technology as an extension of its users to include also the users as extensions of their digital technologies by virtue of the information they share via the Internet. In the concluding section, we discuss the possible switch in the climate change coping strategy from sustainability to resilience to cope with the existential threat to human survival on planet Earth.

Key words: Anthropocene; global warming; climate change; mass extinction event; eon; epoch; Pliocene; Pleistocene; Holocene; Paleo-, Neo-, Tradeo-, Industrio-, Benzino-electro-, and Extremo- Anthropocene